

University of Illinois at Springfield

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Archives/Special Collections

Kathryn M. Harris Memoir

H241. Harris, Kathryn M. (1947-)

Interview and memoir

2 tapes, 180 min., 27 pp.

Harris, a resident of Springfield, serves as the Library Service Director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. She discusses her decision to attend library school at UIUC and the Patriot Act. Harris, a librarian at Sangamon State University (now UIS), was the first African-American hired as a librarian at the Lincoln Public Library in Springfield and worked at SIU School of Medicine Library for several years. Harris also portrays the character of Harriet Tubman at local historical events.

Interview by Jaimean M. Smith, 2009

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Harris, Kathryn M. (Dec. 5, 1947 – Present)

His 520

Oral History Methods

Instructor: Prof. Deborah Kuhn McGregor

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Assignment: Oral History Interview

By: Jaimean Smith (Tamam)

Date: 5/14/09

This is Jaineen Smith doing an interview with Kathryn M. Harris with the Abraham Lincoln Library the library service director. We are in her home in Springfield, IL on Saturday May 2 (2009) around 2:00 pm and about the library science field and her career and her hobbies on the side. And so we will start off with the first question.

Q1: I would like to know as a visitor to Carbondale, how would you describe your birthplace.

A: Carbondale is a small town by comparison to Springfield. It is Southern Illinois University – Carbondale that is the dominant feature of the city. It's just a regular town. Having grown up there on the northeast side of town which was where all the black folks lived. Things have changed now and I think the city has changed because of the presence of the university. Carbondale is still very segregated in my opinion. Most of the black folks still live on the northeast side of Carbondale which is the less affluent part of town. But over the years you know as the civil rights have changed and progress that was made back in the 60's and the improvements in peoples' ability to have jobs, the university's role in the city as a whole think Carbondale is much better now than it was when I was a child growing up there in the 40's, 50's, and 60's. So it's an average I would guess small town but it has a different flair because of the presence of the university. If the university wasn't there, then I think Carbondale would be a very good place to be from as opposed to growing up there. I still have family that lives there. They still live on the northeast side of town. Both my brother and sister could move to 'west side of town' but that's our home. That's where we grew up. That's why they will probably always live in northeast Springfield...northeast Carbondale, rather...so.

Q2: Would you ever return there?

A: Not to live. Carbondale has very, very little to offer aside from the university. No industry there now. There used to be several factories there when I was growing up. But they have long since passed. The Southern Illinois University is the largest employer there and Memorial Hospital would be the second largest. My Dad used to work for the railroad and the railroad used to employ, you know, scores, hundreds of people. Now all of that has changed as well so that opportunity is no longer there. So unless you are "a professional" a skilled person of some kind your only other option aside from retailing service....service jobs is probably at the university, you know, and that takes folks who have rather it be clerical skills or Ph.D.s, you know, so. If you want to succeed in Carbondale your easiest option aside from retail like I said there is a huge mall in Carbondale and it serves as the shopping hub, kinda...sorta, for that part of the state. People come from towns all around Carbondale to shop. But they don't come there to work unless they're working probably for some capacity with the university. Rather it will be, you know, in a clerical position or as instructors in the university or staff, something like that.

Q3: O.K, I guess, right now how involved are you in the community down there?

A: Well, I left Carbondale when I went in graduate school, so I was in my early 20s when I left. I was certainly involved in my church (Bethel African Methodist Episcopal) and school. When I was in school, I'm talking about high school (Carbondale Community High School and Attucks High School). In college I mostly just went to

class, went to work and that. But, so the most community involvement I had in Carbondale was through my church, because my whole family was active in our church.

Q4: O.K....Was there any community mentors guiding you during this time?

A: I supposed my community mentor if you would call it such would have been my mother and my dad too. But my mom was very involved in our community. So much so to the extent that there is a community center in Carbondale named in her honor, because she was very active in the community. She died in 1970 but she was involved with the ...I think at that time in the 60's it was called the Model City Project and urban renewal and all of that. And my mom...well I had nine brothers and sisters, so my mom and dad were always involved with us in school and all of that. And my mom was always involved in the community and my dad was a precinct committeeman for awhile and my mom just involved in a lot of stuff. And over time she got hired by the city during the time of the urban renewal projects that had to have been in the early 60's. And she got very much involved with that and for the revitalization of the northeast side of Carbondale where we all lived. And you know getting basic necessities and there are still necessities that still need to be accomplished on the northeast side of Springfield...on the northeast side of Carbondale. You know, getting such basic things installed as sidewalks, gutters, stop signs, you know, she was active in seeing those things happen. Of course, there was no African-American elected officials in Carbondale at that time or served in any kind of decision-making capacity for city government. That's changed now but she was in there struggling for all of us in northeast Carbondale back in the 1960s. And one of the things is that was involved in the revitalization of northeast side of Carbondale was to have a community center. And my mom was involved in the activities that were required to get funding and contractors and all of that. And she helped design the building and what kind of services would be offered in everything from job services, day care, and health services; she was involved in all of that. But she died before the building was finished and to honor and thank her for devotion and work on that project they named building in her honor and the building is still there. It is still used. It has gone through lots of ups and downs financially. But it is still there and people still go there to get job services, health information, day care services, they have a room part of it is you can rent it out for family reunions, parties, or whatever. And so people still use it so I think that is her mark. So having seen my mom do those kinds of things have over the years encouraged me to become involved in my community too for whatever difference I'll be able to make. I think my mom certainly made a difference, but my mom encouraged all of us, like I said having 9 brothers and sisters, that's a lot. I don't know how common it is but I'm very proud of the fact that all my brothers and sisters but 1 finished college. I think that is quite an achievement and I think we all have our mom and dad to thank for thank that for that encouragement. And to encourage us to do better, to be better, to have better than what they had growing up. I think that's what all parents want anyway, at least, that what they should want.

Q5: O.K., Along with your parents who influenced you to go towards a career in education?

A: Well, when I started college I truly wanted to be a school teacher. I wanted to be a school teacher for as long as I can remember. I used to line my dolls on the couch or, you

know, on the steps of the front porch and have class. Or else I'd make my brothers and sisters or the kids in the neighborhood sit down and we will play school, you know. I always knew I wanted to become a teacher. So, when I went to college that's what I majored in but I didn't know what I wanted to teach. But when I was in high school, I took French. I took French all 4 years and I just dearly loved it. So, I decided maybe I wanted to be a French teacher. Well, I got my degree in French and education. And I couldn't get a job. I did my student teaching and I got very high marks but I couldn't get hired. And in all honesty, I couldn't get hired because I had a child. I had a child my senior year in college. This was in 1968, and that was when my daughter was born. And I graduated in 1969. But I could not get a job. I applied for jobs and I asked my mom I said 'what should I say about Kori?' that's my daughter's name. She said 'well, there she is you can't ignore her, because there she is she's going with you' so, you know, she not going to vanish off the face of the earth. My mom told me....I said when I was filling out the forms, you know, just general forms you have to fill out for any kind of position. I said 'should I say I'm divorced, should I say I'm a widow, should I say I'm single?' She said 'You tell the truth. You are single and have a child. Because if you lie, Kathryn, it will come back to bite you in the butt, eventually. It is always better to tell the truth.' So, I filled out these forms, you know, for a job in a Chicago suburb. And I thought by applying to job in a Chicago suburb that perhaps they might be more forward thinking than school districts in Southern Illinois, which is where I am from. Keep in mind this is 1969. Well, I went and had my interview and did really well and very good references from the education department and from my French teacher. And (I) had a really good interview at the school. And you know, the principal, and I guess he was the principal and the head of the foreign language department at the school. They were very impressed with my credentials and all my recommendations. And so I just knew I had a job. They never asked me anything about Kori, nothing. Well, I went back home really pumped up. I told my mom and dad 'Oh, boy come September I'm going to have a job. Blah, blah, blah...I'm going to be a teacher.' Well, such was not to come to pass. After about probably 3 weeks, 3 or 4 weeks of not hearing anything I said "Mom what should I do about this?" You know, because all my friends are going off to their jobs and here I sit, you know, they got their placements and everything. So, Mom said "Well, I guess you should call and find out what's going on", so I did. I called and had a conversation with the principle and he said "Ms. Hayes, we were all impressed with your credentials. But I could not convince the school board to hire you." They did not think I was an appropriate role model for high school students because I had a child out of wedlock. I said 'Thank you very much' and that was the end of that. And so, I never did get to teach. But my sorority sister, she got a teaching job. She was from Champaign and she got a job in Champaign. And in an elementary school there. And she said 'Kathryn, you know, you've worked at the library ever since you started school. You must like that kind of work. Why don't you apply to go to library school?' And I said "Well, I ain't got a job so I better do something". So I applied to library school. It must have been in like July or maybe late June somewhere along in there. And I applied and was accepted and so that's how I got to be in libraries. And it was truly just on a whim, had that experience not happened with the teaching position, I probably would never gone to library school at all. Because that was the furthest thing...I certainly did enjoy working in the library because that was how I paid for school was through my little student assistant job in the library,

but I did enjoy the work. And I did want to learn more. And the people in the library, I guess, they must of thought I was interested because they gave me more tasks and different kinds of tasks than they gave the other students. They let me do other things they didn't let or did not assign to some of the other students. And I enjoyed it and I did it well and when I told them I was applying to library school it was 'We knew it all along.' I didn't know it, but I guess they though maybe, you know, 'she does like this'. So.....

Q6: So, you did your internship on the college campus of Carbondale or was it in a public library?

A: I worked at the (SIU) university library as an undergraduate student so I worked at Morris Library as an undergraduate student for all 4 years. And then that little story I told, was how I applied. That's why I went to library school. And now they had....it was called educational media program at SIU which I was accepted in and I went there for... (Phone rings). At SIU they had an educational media program which was designed for people who wanted to work in public school libraries, but that program was not accredited by the American Library Association. So since my friend, sorority sister had asked me about going to library school at the University of Illinois which was an accredited school from the American Library Association I applied and I was accepted at the U of I. so I did not finish the education media program. Because I said 'If I go to a school that is accredited by American Library Association I will have a better chance of getting a job at the library as opposed to going from a program that was not accredited'. And so that has been helpful, you know. I did change my mind and did go to the University of Illinois for library school.

Q7: So, you did get into library science, you know, you probably be, I guess, have a career in the college campus compare to the public school system so you gave up on that all together.

A: Right, I gave up on the public school system and I guessed I thought maybe I could work in a public library. Where, you know, I was thinking that since I have this child maybe the library boards are not as narrow minded as the public school boards were so. And indeed they weren't because when I did finish library school in 1971, I was indeed hired with no issues at a public library. So I guess maybe working at a public library you don't have to be exposed everyday to teenage students who might look to you as a role model. I have no ideal what the logic was, you know, that the public school board used as opposed to the logic and rationale that the public library board used. But I was hired at Lincoln Library here in Springfield in....I guess it must have been in 1971 because that's when I finished library school. And I was the 1st African-American with a library degree to be hired at a public library here in Springfield.

Q8: So, how long did you stay.....?

A: In the public library?

Q9: Yes.

A: I only stayed in the public library for about 18 months because I got a better offer. I got a better paying offer from then Sangamon State University. So I worked down at Sangamon State University. And I was on the second year hires for library faculty out at Sangamon State. But I only stayed there for probably....I got married in 1972 and I was

probably at Sangamon State for maybe only a year and a half...two years at most, because I moved to Florida....Miami, Florida with my husband and Kori. And we lived in Florida for until '79. Then I came back to Illinois and I came back to Springfield in 1980. And I've been here ever since.

Q10: What did you do before in Florida?

A: In Florida, I worked...I had two library jobs when I was in Florida. We lived in Miami. But at the time, we first moved to Miami, I was not hired. I did not get a job immediately in Miami. I worked at Nova University in Fort Lauderdale. That was about 20 miles away. Not that far....but I worked at Nova University in the behavioral sciences library. I enjoyed it very much but then I got better offer at Florida International University which has been started the same year that Sangamon State been started and the same kind of university.....upper division and graduate school only. And since Florida International University was, you know, modeled after the same educational principles or whatever that Sangamon State was. The folks at the library there thought why my goodness she worked in upper division university so the transition and the background and experience, you know, thought that would be good so I was hired at Florida International University as a circulation librarian. That was probably in....towards the mid- to late 70's....'74...'75 somewhere along in there. I really don't remember anymore. But, then I stayed there until 1979. So.....

Q11: You said the first school was Novi?

A: Nova University....N.O.V.A. It was in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. And I lived in Miami. It was a commute.....everyday. But then I moved to Florida International which was closer.

Q12: Florida International University?

A: Umhum

Q13: So, did you like it in Florida or did family bring you back home?

A: I did like it in Florida. Family brought me back to Illinois because my husband and I separated. And so I left Florida and him and went home to Daddy in Carbondale. But I didn't stay in Carbondale very long because I couldn't get a job. So, I came to Springfield. And I didn't immediately get a job. It took a few months. I worked as a secretary for the board of higher education for several months before I got hired at the medical school.

Q14: In town?

A: Huha, I worked at SIU Medical Library for several years. Then I got hired at the state library. And then I went to what was formerly called the Illinois State Historical Library now the Presidential Library. My sister told me when I came back to Springfield she said 'Kathryn....' now when I got hired at Illinois State Historical Library she said 'I hope this is your last job because you run out of libraries to work in Springfield. You worked at the public library, the medical school, Sangamon State, and so there's nothing left. I hope now you are at the state historical library your narrow behind will stay there.'

And indeed I have, and so I hope to retire there from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. One of these days, one of these days...one of these years.

Q15: When you were introduced to library science by your friend, was that a popular career path?

A: When I started library school back in the 70's there were many programs at library schools across the country that was focusing on hiring....focusing on recruiting minority, particularly then African-Americans students because there were not a lot of African-American librarians in the 70's. Now that certainly increased now but at the time I was in school even though I was not in this program at University of Illinois, University of Illinois had a program in the 70's that targeted recruitment of African-Americans librarians. So, it was a very good career path and career choice back in the 70's.

Q16: Was it able to compete with doctors, engineers or were they still struggling to get people to focus on....

A: No, in fact there were lots of applicants to the program at Illinois. But there were more applicants than there were spaces in the program. So, at that time I think there was a genuine effort by the library profession, the library science field, to get more African-Americans to become librarians. And now over time not only has there been special programs developed to encourage and promote and recruit African-American librarians. But because of the diversity of our nation and how there are so many different ethnic groups; Hispanic librarians, Native American librarians, almost any ethnic group you can think of these days. Library schools continue to target those and now they are called underrepresented minorities. The underrepresented minorities when I started out as a profession, was African-Americans. But now Hispanics are making significant inroads. But in any kind of library whether it's a public library, a school library, a university library, if you are not of the "majority population", to me, when you go into a library you always want to see someone that looks like you. And if you look around in lots of places where there is an African-American population you don't see a lot of African-American librarians. We're out there but predominately in larger cities. I doubt very seriously if there is a professional degree librarian who is African-American on the staff of my own public library in my hometown, Carbondale. That is not to say there might not be African-Americans on the staff but in a professional position with a professional degree, professional salary I don't think that is African-American professional librarian on the staff of my own hometown library. Carbondale has a population of probably 50 to 60,000 people in it. I really don't know what the population of Carbondale is. But, on a couple of times that I have been to the Carbondale public library since I been a librarian, I never seen anyone who looked like me in a professional position.

Q17: Is the black community proactive in letting the population know that there is a career in library science or is it the money that keeps them from taking it seriously?

A: It's all of that. Being a librarian as far as pay is concerned is probably, not in a public school anyway...public library, it's not too much better than being a school teacher, you know how poorly paid school teachers are, yet how valuable they are. In the university setting it is probably you do get a better salary but, you know, just depends on what kind of library that person chooses to work in, what path of study, because in

library school we did focus on public libraries. You can focus on university libraries. You can focus being a special librarian and take special courses if you want to work in a chemical library or something like that. There are courses that prepare you to deal with that field of literature. Medical librarianship, it just depends on where you want to focus. Public librarians are, you know, to start off are probably no better paid than school teachers. And I would think that, you know, certainly it is to be important that....I think librarians have an important role in society and all of that but we are just not the best paid. And when you talk to young people at job fairs and even just talking with young people, my own daughter is a good example. She said "No, mom I don't want to be a librarian". But the library field is changing tremendously, given all the technology that's in libraries today and the applications and uses of technology to organize knowledge and all of that. When I do meet a young person who is interested in libraries and librarianship, I encourage them to learn about the fundamentals of library science, books and information, but as much as you can learn, as much as you can about computers and their applications to knowledge because that's where the profession seems to be going. I'm coming down the other side of the mountain, so to speak, in so far as my professional career is concerned. I have been a librarian for 38 years now so I'm coming down this side of the mountain. For those who are coming up...up this side of the mountain they need to be as technologically savvy as they possibly can be. Because the people that they will be serving come from the same venue as they do and, you know, if you supposed to be helping them you have to be knowledgeable about RSS feeds and digital archives and second life and twitters and tweeters. And all of that, you know, Face Book and YouTube, all of these things can have applications for libraries and, you know, I have people who are members of my family who are on Face Book. My brother who is four or five years older than me he's on Face Book. He said "Why aren't you on Face Book, Kathryn? You of all people ought to be on Face Book." And I said "You know what, when I get home from work looking at computer and Face Book is the last thing I want to do. So you with Face Book and sister-in-law can Face Book all you want." But there are applications, you know, even at the library, for example. We have some of our programs we have done. You can find us on YouTube, you know. It a part of the museum side but even so public libraries, university libraries they all have....they offer workshops from our library system about second life and getting on YouTube to having webinars and all of this stuff and, you know, my brain is like 'oh my god'. You know, I hate to say this but I'm too old for this. I don't know if my brain can take in any more of these kinds of applications. But in order to help and to serve the people who cross the threshold of any kind of library. We as librarians have to be as technologically savvy as the people we try to assist in finding information. We know how to find it, of course. So, we have to be right out there keeping our skills up because the world around us is changing. Google and all of that I still do...I still can find information the old-fashion way with a piece of paper, pencil, and a book. But, why should I go that route when I can put something in Google and know it is a valuable and a reputable and a good site that provides accurate information. Why should I go through all that trouble when all I have to do is touch a keyboard and find the answer? But everything is not on the internet even though people think it is...everything is not. There is some stuff that takes librarians to find them because it's not out on the internet. And I think that's one of the concerns that I have for...I say for junior high and up these days, if they can't find it on the internet they don't

think it exists. Well, if you go to your local library and talk to your librarian, I bet it does exist and a librarian can help you find it, because not everything is out there. But that seems to be the mentality these days, and that's a long way from where librarianship was when I first started in the profession. But like I said I'm the down side of the mountain. I think I already reached my peak.

Q18: What was the profession's definition of itself at that time?

A: Oh, yeah. It was...

Q19: Just books?

A: Pretty much, you know pretty much books, periodicals, and journals. And now those things still exist, but now they can be electronically delivered as on a computer screen.

Q20: Is there a movement to scan everything for online or are there certain things that so rare and delicate they just can't do it?

A: There is a little bit of all of that. I think "everything" is a too big of a word because everything will never be online. There will always be something that just got published that isn't online. However it can be published in electronic format. Because some of the journals for example, especially in the medical field when I worked in the medical library we got lots, and lots of printed publications, many of those today are only available in electronic format. Print has fallen off. But I don't think we will ever come a time when everything will only be available in an online format. Because like much of what you said, some things because of their rarity, their condition they can't be handled enough to be scanned so you probably will always have books and manuscripts of some kind in real live paper format. At least that's what I think. But in listening and watching over the last several months where we have seen the newspaper...the daily newspaper is rapidly becoming the thing of the past. Where major newspapers across the country some which have been around since the 1800s, you know, the Seattle Post, the Seattle Post Intelligencer, for example, whatever the paper was in Denver that's been around since the days of the gold rush or whatever going west. Other major dailies are starting to just fade out but only be available in an online format. But I am one of those who know and believe that even though people say that "everybody has a computer", everybody doesn't. There is always the "digital divide" and that gets into a whole bunch of other economic and social issues so even though people say 'everybody has a computer' that isn't true. And children have access to computers at school doesn't mean they have one at home. Particularly in the minority community we don't...and that isn't everybody of course but there is definitely a digital divide based on race, base on economics, and other socio-economic issues. So, I don't know why I said all that but it sounded good at that time. But I personally don't like to read newspapers online. I don't like to read books online. I don't like to read magazine articles online. I still like paper if, even though at the end of many e-mails these days, 'please consider the environment before you print this message'. Well, since the development of e-mail and online services, I bet you we all have more paper than we did before. And to me, that tells me people still like the tactile sensation you get from turning the pages of a book, turning the pages of a magazine turning the pages of...you can't get ...well, I guess with Kindle and stuff like that, you can take your book to bed but you sure can't curl up with it because it's not going to turn

the page until you push the button or move the cursor or whatever. It's just not the same as reading a book as reading something on a computer screen. And when things get too much longer than one screen to me I push that print button mighty fast, mighty fast. Not good for the environment but I do recycle the paper and use the other side. So, I think that the profession, as it was when I started, it has changed tremendously and it is because of the advance that has been made in technology. And I think it's good. And I'm confident that these recent library school graduates... They're just... I'm in awe with some of them that when, you know, I go to conferences and what not, I'm amazed at some of the things they do using technology in their libraries to provide programming for their users. It's good, but I'm just old now, you know.

Q21: What about the public audience's view of the library, has it changed with the professionals or is the public...?

A: I think that the public, generally especially in these economic times, is getting to appreciate libraries more during hard economic times, particularly public libraries. Even though, I'm not a public librarian, people use libraries because libraries are no longer just books, magazines, and periodicals. You can go to your local public libraries and get not maybe the movie that just been released out at White Oaks... well they took that movie theater away, but you know, out at Parkway Pointe or whatever you might not get that movie at your public library but you can get one that's a couple of months old and guess what it's free. Of course you pay taxes to get that service but if you have a library card your library card opens... this sounds hackneyed and like a commercial, but it opens up a world of information to you for free. People can go to the library to get books, magazines, videos; you can get games for your kids; you can check out puzzles ;....(End of Side A, Tape 1)

Q22: You were talking about fishing rods?

A: Yes, I went to a library the other day and you could check out a fishing rod if you chose to. That's in conjunction with some program from the Department of Natural Resources. But you can get all kinds of services. And during these hard economic times, people are going to libraries for entertainment purposes to get videos because you can get them for free at the libraries. People are going there to use the internet to look at job sites; information on how to write a resume, all kinds of information is available at your public library. So, I think in these difficult economic times, people go to the library, you know, to use Consumer Reports find out what kind of refrigerator they ought to buy; what kind of car. I mean, there are all kinds of services at the public library. And I think in these difficult economic times when people are looking very closely at their pocket books and, you know, give a lot of thought on how to spend their money, the public library is a source that they can use to help them save money or spend their money more wisely. The library has always been a place for self-enrichment and betterment just through books and reading, generally. You can go to the library to learn how to use your computer. You know, they can teach you how to use Word, and how to use Excel Spreadsheets and all those kinds of things and it is all free. So, I think that's what libraries have always done because you supposed to serve your community based on what the community's needs are. And public libraries have always done that. But, I think right now through what's

happening and it's proven in tough economic times, usage of libraries just goes up through the roof.

Q23: We are going to talk about the PATRIOT Act.

A: Ah

Q24: There is a provision in there. It is some kind of provision amended for the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, Section 215 known as the 'Angry Librarians' provision. I don't know if you know it or not. It states that "Federal Bureau of Investigations has the authority to make..."

A: Has the right to come to your library and see who has been using your books! And take your circulation records. And I think that's just awful. Now, when that act was passed, that was shortly after 9/11. I supposed it did have some merit. But, I view it as an unnecessary invasion of privacy, unless there is a very good reason. Certainly, I don't want, you know, people to get bombed or anything like that. But, I think it is appropriate that those folks from the FBI or the police or whoever they representing have a subpoena to get that information because it is private. I don't think anyone has the right to know what I'm reading unless they have a very good reason to know it and that very good reason will have to be national security. I think people have the right to read what they want. I think libraries have a right to have whatever books they want to have. But, guess what, we have free will and choice. And if you don't choose to read it, then don't. you know, I do know that there have been librarians who...and I support them wholeheartedly, freedom to read and stand up against and speak, you know, in the House of Representatives against the police coming in getting access to circulation records and getting into people's business the number of people who are "caught" versus the number of people whose rights have been trampled upon when they were looking for one person when they got everybody that's not fair. And so, I don't particularly support that act. There is another one called CIPA Child Internet Protection Act for public libraries. I have a lot of empathy and sympathy for public librarians who are...who have to comply with those rules in order to get federal money in the form of grants that funded....provided by the federal government. You have to comply. So, you have to have filters, for example, on your computers at your local library to have access to be able to apply and/or receive certain kinds of federal funds for library services. But the bad thing about that...I understand why...to keep children from being preyed upon by predators and having them to see inappropriate websites, because there's a lot of porn sites out there on the internet. But there are also health related sites that provide quality information that those filters also block. There is no perfect filter. And this issue in question has been talked about in public libraries for several years. I don't know if it will ever be a good answer or a good filter developed. I don't see how it could be. Breast will always be breast. But, breast doesn't have to be in a sexual or sensual way. Breast can be in reference to breast cancer, breast disease. But there are some filters that the word 'breast' you don't get any of that. So, it's a fine line that public librarians and public school librarians have to work that. That why I think librarians as people will always be necessary to help find the information if you can't find it because of blocks such as those filters. Because the information is there you just might have to do it the old fashion way, through a book instead of on the internet. Now, working as I do in special library and having worked in university libraries we don't have to deal with the same kind of issues like that of Child

Internet Protection Act (CIPA). But we do have to in some situations have to deal with the PATRIOT Act. And universities will probably be good targets. The university supposed to be the place for free exchange of ideas and all of that. Well, some of those free exchanges of ideas...and we all know that there are people at universities in the United States who are here on...not always the best interest of the United States at heart, so to speak. I suppose that's just the price we pay for living in the world we live in today. We have to take the good with the bad and just try to go with the flow. I certainly don't know the answer. But, I do think people should have the right to read. And that the circulation records to know what John Q. Public or whomever has been reading, I think that they do need a subpoena to do that. And I admire librarians who say 'No, you just can't come in here and do that.' You can't just take that without direction from the court in a form of a subpoena. I think that's too much trampling on our rights as U.S. citizens.

Q25: So, has the PATRIOT Act tainted the public perception of libraries or they sort of they viewed it as government trampling on another group?

A: I would think that the public see it as...well, it depends if you are on the right or left of that question. There are some people who support the government's right to come in and do that and there are others that say no, the government doesn't have the right to do that.

Q26: You haven't lost patrons...?

A: No, no... We people have not stopped coming to libraries because of that. I don't think. And using our public libraries because of the fear that Big Brother is watching and is going to come, I don't think that has happened by any stretch at all.

Q27: On a national level what is the American Library Association doing with the PATRIOT Act? Are they fighting it still? Are they still talking?

A: Oh, yes. The conversation still continues from the point of view of librarians that people have the right to read whatever and it a very private matter and confidentiality is still important to librarians.

Q28: Are there lobbyist? They still trying to find a line...?

A: Umhum....But it is very fuzzy and there are librarians who sympathize, who are on the side of the most harsh interpretation of the law. Those folks exist too but, you know, everybody is not going to agree on everything all the time. And I think that's a part of the beauty of living in America. It is we can agree to disagree. And I don't think it there will ever be the PATRIOT Act isn't going to go away because of the memory of 9/11 will be with all of us forever, probably. So, we want to protect ourselves and...but when it comes to reading and access to information I think librarians will always be on the forefront of having free and open access to information regardless. I suppose if someone comes in and identify himself as a terrorist and said that to a librarian, I think she'll be stupid if she didn't call for assistance immediately regardless. That's an absurd situation that isn't going to happen. But just because someone doesn't look like you and reading something you don't necessarily agree with does not mean that person is going to go out and blow up the world tomorrow. I don't know if any of this makes sense. That is the extreme to where it can all go.

Q29: So, this will never be solved just like other issue like abortion rights.

A: Correct. Absolutely

Q30: It will always change with administrations.

A: Probably...Probably.

Q31: Back in 2004 in September and October, you went to South Africa.

A: Yes, how did you know that? Yes, I did.

Q32: The internet

A: That dreaded internet! Yes, I did go. I went to South Africa as a representative of the Illinois Library Association to talk about advocating for libraries and library services. It was 10 years since the end of apartheid in South Africa. It was truly...I never been out of the United States and to have my...I have been to Canada ok but to...I have been to the Bahamas. But to have the opportunity to travel all the way to the continent and to go to a place like South Africa it was absolutely incredible. It was probably the most wonderful thing that has happened to me. I think I was 56 at the time. In my 56 years of living, it was the best experience I have ever had. I will always, always remember it. Probably, not only seeing the country, the nation, the people, the trees, the flowers, but the one thing I will always remember will be standing in the cell where Nelson Mandela had spent 24 years. In a space that's probably only as big as this enclosure right here.

Q33: In the kitchen.

A: Not the whole kitchen. Just this space (7'x7')

Q34: The counter top area.

A: That was phenomenal I will remember that as long as I lived. And to hear the guides...that was something too, I will always remember. The people who gave the tour of the prison...the name of it is on the tip of my tongue....will come eventually, the prison where Nelson Mandela was for 24 years. The people who were the tour guides had also been prisoners there. And I was in awe of them as how they can tell that story. But no one can tell it like them because they had experienced it. And there were people in the tour group that I was with, including myself; we all had tears just streaming down our faces. I mean it was phenomenal it was like an out of body experience almost. But I certainly did enjoy visiting the libraries and meeting the people and hearing how things have changed since the ending of apartheid. And what struggles they still have had and have yet to deal with. The picture I had in my mind of South Africa before I went was what I had seen on television. The townships and all the shanties...now, I was there as a tourist, but impression was that it all look like what you saw on television. Downtown Johannesburg was probably no different than downtown Chicago. It was....I did see from the car shanty towns like you see on television, but that was certainly not the experience. I had the opportunity to go into a home of 3 or 4 of the librarians. While I was there, their houses were no different than...they had different colors. I don't think I want bright pink walls. But their homes were no different than ours. They had yards. They had streets. They had sidewalks. They had light poles. It was just amazing the images that 'The West' or Europeans or Americans...The images you see on TV, then you go to that place and it's nothing...nothing like that. One of these days, I would love to go back. One of the most interesting, challenging things that I learned from the librarians there...I was mostly

in public libraries...was the literacy rate was just starting to make an incline. Because so many South Africans, black, had been denied educational opportunities, period, under apartheid. So, there was an increase in literacy. But one of the challenges that the librarians faced in public libraries, especially, is getting the books and materials in the dialects that many of the black Africans speak. One librarian told me there were 13 different dialects in the community that her library serves. I said "Do you have books and materials in all of those?" "No because the books and materials were not printed because the people could not read them." So, there was no industry for that and those kinds of things. Making information available in all of the dialects was just starting to grow, when I was there. I always remember that...because how do you deal with that. Their libraries were...the libraries I visited...they were always busy. There were always users because the people have been denied so much...the ability and opportunity to learn that...it was phenomenal. Just to see in one library they needed to have more space because they got so busy. They made a...they created another like a loft in the library just to have more places to put books and materials. Because they just did not have enough space. So, they reinforced the building and reinforced the floor so they can add another floor to the building because the people...the users were...had just out grown the library that has been there before. It was truly a phenomenal experience.

Q35: Have you conducted other workshops outside and/or inside the country? Is this your very first one?

A: Oh, I don't know. It all depends what you consider a workshop.

Q36: Presenting...library advocacy...?

A: Oh, yes. That was the first time I ever done it outside of the U.S. but I have been involved in programs that do that for Illinois libraries in the past even before I went to South Africa.

Q37: I'm not sure if you know about the Geneva conference in 2003. There was a gather of international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

A: In reference to...I probably don't.

Q38: It was the World Summit on the Information Society. No. It was a gathering of libraries, publishing companies, archives, museums, monuments, and sites personnel coming together. Basically, the main question they had was "What are the international issues with which librarians should concern themselves with?"

A: Oh, that is a hard question and no I'm not into international librarianship. So, I will have to take a pass on that.

Q39: Was the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library involved in that world summit?

A: We weren't.

Q40: Not at all. I found this information in the journal Libri. And that was their question. Another question they had from that journal was "Why should librarians and information workers get involved in international advocacy?" I thought when you went to South Africa that was a part of that.

A: My trip to South Africa had nothing to do with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. It was sponsored by the Illinois Library Association. And advocacy in the context to my trip to South Africa was focused more on the cities I visited. Getting legislative and community support for improvement of libraries. It was nothing as global as those concerns that you just mentioned. It was much more grass-roots teaching people how to talk to your...what will be comparable to our alderman. How to talk to your mayor; how to talk to your state legislator about library related issues and the roles libraries play in their community. So it was very much a grass-root. It wasn't pie-in-the-sky nebulous issues about copyright and intellectual freedom. It's about how can I keep the doors of my public library open to serve the community. That was the focus of that kind of advocacy that I was talking about in South Africa.

Q41: In your spare time, you also have a skill in the performing arts that compliments your career. Do you consider your art as a form of 'library advocacy'?

A: What skill is this?

Q42: Acting skills

A: Oh, that's what I thought you were talking about. The fact that I'm a librarian is totally coincidental. The fact that I perform on stage is totally coincidental. I mean...the two have no relationship to each other. If my being a librarian inspires someone else to be...O.K....If my being a librarian who acts on stage can inspire someone else to be a librarian then I would think I have achieved some monumental task but the two are totally unrelated. I think that...people have asked me 'Are you an actress, Kathryn?' people who don't know me, especially when I have gone out of town, and they just John Q. Public in the audience, well 'Are you an actress?' 'No, I'm a librarian'. This acting stuff was just something that happened to me. It isn't anything I sought out to be at all. It just happened on a fluke. It did...my life is a series of flukes, I guess, Jainean. Because the very first acting I that did was about a 5- or 6-minute presentation at a local cemetery walk that we had. And then Mr. Phil Funkenbusch, who's over the shows at the museum, he helped to develop my 'Harriet Tubman' character. Then he asked me to be in a couple of plays and I said to him "I haven't been in a play since I was in seventh grade."

Q43: O.K...You were talking about your acting. I saw it as library advocacy because I thought 'Harriet Tubman' and you going to the public schools and you were introducing some form of history to the kids so I thought maybe you were talking about history to get them interested, especially black history.

A: All of that does enter in but it isn't on an obvious level. Certainly, when people ask me "How do I know so much about Harriet Tubman? Because I read". I read books, I read on the internet, I read everything I could find about Harriet Tubman to make this character come alive. I think that children learn history very well when they see it in a first-person presentation. I have seen children in the grocery store over the summer. And I would have on shorts, a t-shirt, and a baseball cap. I've seen kids say to their mom "That's Harriet Tubman. She was at my school." And I might have been to their school back in February or March. That tells me that what I did that day at their school they remember. I had a teacher tell me just last week that the presentation that I do she said "The children will remember that they may have read don't know how many books about

Harriet Tubman, but having seen your first-person presentation makes it more real. It makes history come alive." I always go and give my presentation at school I talk about the library. Because the kids...some of them..."How do you know so much about her?" "Well, I read books about her and guess what; you can read books about her, too. Go to the library and talk to a librarian." So, I guess in a way, not only am I advocating the use of libraries and letting them know this is how you learn stuff by going to a library and reading. But I am also encouraging them to learn more about history also and African-American kids about African-American history, too. So, I guess my presentation can be looked at two or three different levels. I do know over the years when I portray Harriet Tubman, I think that...and other re-enactors have told me....or other first person presenters or whatever the phrase is for the moment...it makes history come alive. There is a saying if you read something you remember 'x' amount of percentage but if you do something it makes longer lasting impression.

Q44: Do have other historical figures want to do?

A: Probably not because once again, I am on that down side of that mountain, Jaanean. So, probably not...I don't know...Who knows. Maybe when I retire, I might develop someone else, but right now, Harriet is certainly my favorite.

Q45: Will this become your second career?

A: Probably not a second career I think as long as people have an interest in meeting Harriet Tubman then I will be interested in presenting Harriet Tubman to them.

Q46: In conclusion, what do you forecast for yourself and the library science and information systems profession?

A: For me...personally?

Q47: Yourself and the profession.

A: For myself, I look forward to getting to foot of that hill that I reference. Because retirement is...I will be 62 in December. Retirement sounds pretty good. I think the library profession will always be a need for librarians. There is so much information out there. And librarians are guides, so to speak. They help people navigate that information highway. And so, I think there will always be a need for us and the profession because information is always going to have to, somehow or other, be managed and organized. That's what librarians do: manage, organize, and interpret information. So, I don't think there will ever not be a need for us. But the way in which we do that will likely change. And it will likely change base on the advances that will continue to be made in technology.

Q48: Are these professions will be the ones to close the information divide?

A: Digital divide?

Q49: Yes, digital divide.

A: Probably not and I say that because I think the digital divide will not be closed until this country addresses some of its...many socioeconomic issues and racial issues that we have in spite the election of our first African-American president. I don't think that one little piece. There is a hell of a lot more that needs to be addressed. The racial

problems in this country did not disappear on January 20, (2009). They are still there.
(Truncated Ending of Tape 1, Side B)

(Section of Tape 2, Side A)

Q50: On a national level, librarianship...if everything is over information compare to commodity and trade as being the number one thing...the number one power to have. I thought maybe libraries be able to teach lot of different kinds of groups. Show them how to get these...

A: Librarians do have a role. Librarians, I believe, committed to social responsibility issues more than some other professions. Because we deal with whoever crosses our threshold. And we have to treat everyone or we should treat everyone the same regardless if is the president of GM (General Motors) or the homeless person on the street. When they come to the library, everyone should be on the same playing field. So, in a way I suppose librarians could, but I think people think of librarians as little, shy, timid people that goes around saying 'shush'. That image is still out there and some people still hold that image of librarians. But the librarian that goes around telling people to 'shush' probably needs to be at the end of her career. Those days are long past. There is so much information out there and our young people really need be able to be taught how to use it, harness it, and capture it in ways that can theoretically make life better for all of us. I mean, that sounds kind of wishy-washy and whatever but the library as a source of information that's always going to be. I guess it's a question of how people use that information. It's on us. That's our responsibility.

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Kathryn M. Harris is the library service director at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois. I conducted an interview with Ms. Harris in her home on Saturday, May 2, 2009. The Carbondale native narrates about her childhood home, educational journey, family and career. She realized her desire at an elementary school age to wanting become a school teacher. Ms. Harris earned her Bachelor of Science degree in education with an emphasis on French from Southern Illinois University – Carbondale in 1969. She shares with me her obstacles of pursuing her childhood dream. Her dream of becoming a French teacher in a public school became unattainable. Life's mishaps led her into a whole new unforeseen career path. A friend and a sorority sister enlighten Ms. Harris on this path of library science. By the fall of 1969, she briefly enrolled in the educational media program at SIU. Based on a lack of accreditation, Ms. Harris transferred to University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to enroll in the library and information science program. By 1971, she earned another degree. It was a Master of Science degree in library science from University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

After graduation, Ms. Harris was hired to work in Springfield's Lincoln Library. She became the first African-American with a library degree to be hired at a public library in Springfield. The employment lasted eighteen months, because Ms. Harris received a better job offer at Sangamon State University. She joined the second year hires on the library faculty. For two years of employment with the university, a new marriage led her to Miami, Florida. She was able to find employment at Nova University and Florida International University. After a divorce some years later, Ms. Harris and daughter went back to Carbondale, Illinois to extended family. Low job prospects in

Carbondale forced the two back to Springfield. She was accepted on the faculty staff at SIU Medical Library. Finally, Ms. Harris jumped over to the Illinois State Historical Library now the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. As mentioned by Ms. Harris, librarianship was one of a “series of flukes” in her life. She has enjoyed this fluke for 38 years.

Another one of her life’s flukes would be participating in the performing arts. Ms. Harris’ first person re-enactment of Harriet Tubman combines history and library advocacy. A colleague next door in the museum helped to develop her character. This school project allows history to come alive for the children. The question and answer sessions after the presentation is used as the gateway to books in the library. She encourages the children to learn more about history by learning how to use a library. As she approaches age 62, she is not willing to make acting a second career. As long as people want to see Harriet Tubman, Ms. Harris will continue to present her to the interested audience.

In my research, I came across articles in the journal *Libri*. These articles discuss the library and information science issues on a national level. The first article continues to ask questions proposed by the 2003 Geneva World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The summit had a gathering of international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Anyone involved in libraries, publishing, archives, museums, monuments, and sites were invited to the summit. P.J Lor and J.J. Britz’s article “*Challenges of the Approaching Knowledge Society: Major International Issues Facing LIS Professionals*” ask ‘Why should librarians and information workers be involved in international advocacy?’ and ‘And what are the international issues with

which librarians should concern themselves?”¹ I approached Ms. Harris with these questions, but she was unable to answer anything on international librarianship. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library was not involved in the world summit. The second article expresses the need for libraries to be proactive in their communities. Bharat Mehra and Ramesh Srinivasan’s article “*The Library-Community Convergence Framework for Community Action: Libraries as Catalysts of Social Change*” tells of recent interactions between LIS professionals. It shows how minority and underserved groups must have their needs met by reformulating the role of libraries. Ms. Harris’ trip to South Africa fits the community action role of a librarian. As one the participants at the Library & Information Association of South Africa workshops, she presented grass-root applications for their local librarians. The workshop consisted of topics as: How to talk to your mayor and /or state legislator about library related issues; how do we keep the public library door open. The third article analyzes the image American libraries have after September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Tracy Hartman’s article, “*The Changing Definition of U.S. Libraries*”, ask how will libraries resist political pressure to conform to knee-jerk post 9/11 statues. Hartman addresses the struggle between maintaining “traditional values” for the public or revamp itself for today’s concerns.² Ms. Harris expressed strong feeling against section 215 “Angry Librarians Provision” of the U.S. PATRIOT Act. The provision amended the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Section 215 states:

¹ P.J. Lor & J.J. Britz. “Challenges of the Approaching Knowledge Society: Major International Issues Facing LIS Professionals”, *Libri* 57, no. 3 (2007): 111.

² Tracy Hartman. “The Changing Definition of U.S. Libraries”, *Libri* 57, no. 1 (2007): 1.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) the authority to ‘make an application for an order requiring the production of any tangible things (including books, records, papers, documents, and other items), for an investigation to protect against international terrorism,’ and compels the person receiving the order not to discuss it with anyone else.³

Ms. Harris believes that the books and circulation records are private. The FBI should not be allowed to take anything without a subpoena. She gives support to fellow librarians who speak out for freedom to read and choice. In the interview, she addresses the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA). This act applies to the public libraries more than the specialized libraries (ALPL). Ms. Harris states that the libraries have not lost patrons because of ‘Big Brother’s’ legislations. On a national level, the American Library Association is still fighting over the PATRIOT Act. She believes the interpretation of the statutes will always change with governmental administrations. This will be another never ending political battle.

In addition to the journal articles, I reviewed an online interview with the U of I Urbana-Champaign News Detail. The interview was printed on December 9, 2008. The two-page article is “Harris Provides Leadership at Presidential Library”. The interview covered her time in the graduate program, the outreach program in the public schools, and her present employment. I also found a website named Library & Information Association of South Africa. A link led me to an essay Ms. Harris wrote on her trip to South Africa. Another essay written by the Vice-Chair the LIASA Western Cape detailed the workshop presented by Ms. Harris. This break-out session was titled “Are You a Library Advocate? Marketing and Promoting Your Library”. The essay described the

³ Ibid., 1.

overview of the presenters, delegates, and the program objectives. These essays addressed 'library advocacy' as a continuing education event. The workshop was to define, create, and market 'library advocacy'. This empowered new term will evolve the LIS field into catalysis for social change on a local and national level.

Interviewer Bio:

Jaineen Smith: Birthplace & Resident of Springfield, IL

Lincoln Land Community College: AS Accounting; AS Business Admin.

University of Illinois at Springfield: BS Business Admin; Currently History Graduate Student as of 5/14/09

Employer: State of IL – Dept. of Children & Family Services: Acct Tech II